

Systems. Other interfaces and network architectures (e.g., Ethernet, parallel port, and the like) may be substituted however. Furthermore, interface 112 may implement, for example, the IGT Gaming SASTM communication protocol or the CDS GDAPTM communication protocol for communication with gaming machine 102A, or a custom communication protocol. In gaming machine 102A, message display 118 may be coupled to the frame of the gaming machine or may be inside the cabinet of the gaming machine. However, any means of associating display 118 with gaming machine 102A may be used as long as display 118 is visible from gaming machine 102A.

[0037] Interface 112 is programmed to provide an interactive messaging operation. That is, user message activity, such as touching an active area of display 118 or entering information from keypad 114, causes a response from or action by system 100. One such response is the sending of data over network 126 to another location within system 100 so that a message is displayed. Another response is the display of a menu that depends on the area touched and/or user preferences.

[0038] User preferences may be stored in interface memory 146 that is controlled by a CPU 144. CPU 144 controls the sending of messages by gaming location 102, the receipt of messages by gaming location 102 and the display of messages by gaming location 102 in a well known manner.

[0039] Game controller 108 is responsible for operation of the gaming machine 102A. Thus the game controller may include a microprocessor, memory, game software, and support circuitry to implement a slot machine or other type of game. The display 110 provides displays necessary for the play of the game, such as a display of slot machine rotors.

[0040] Gaming location 102 also includes a club card reader 150 that can read a MAG number located on a magnetic strip of a club card 152, which may, for example, be a smart card. The MAG number is unique for each player. Card 152 also sometimes bears a player ID number that is human readable, but is not machine-readable. The card reader sends the MAG number to central authority 120, which converts the MAG number to an OCR number. This feature

prevents any potential misuse due to fraudulent creation of a bogus club card. Memory 121 maintains a table that correlates OCR numbers with player ID numbers. An example of misuse prevented or inhibited by converting the MAG number to an OCR number is as follows. The clerks at the stations generally have access to the OCR numbers, but not the MAG numbers. As a result, a person operating outside system 100 could not duplicate a new player card with a MAG number corresponding to an existing club card. If such a person could duplicate an existing club card, the person may be tempted to use the duplicate card to cash out a player's account. The conversion of the MAG number to an OCR number is an important feature that inhibits such temptation.

[0041] Central authority 120 translates an OCR number to a corresponding player ID number. This feature allows a single player ID number to identify more than one OCR number. The player ID number can be used by the central authority to address the value of an account corresponding to the player ID number or to access preferences of the player. Thus, the central authority keeps no account value